

Enhancing Social Interaction Anxiety among Adolescent Population in Chennai: An Empirical Study

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ABSTRACT

Social interaction anxiety represents a significant dimension of adolescent psychopathology, characterized by a persistent fear of negative evaluation, heightened discomfort during interpersonal engagements, and a tendency toward avoidance of social situations. Within college populations, these manifestations critically impair academic participation, peer interaction, and overall psychosocial functioning [6][8][12]. Contemporary research indicates an increasing prevalence of anxiety-related concerns among adolescents at both global and national levels, particularly within the Indian context, where academic demands, social expectations, and performance pressures intensify vulnerability to social anxiety symptoms [9][15].

From a cognitive-behavioural perspective, social interaction anxiety is maintained through maladaptive thought patterns, anticipatory fear, and avoidance behaviours that reinforce distress and limit adaptive social learning [1][6]. Although conceptually comprising multiple behavioural and emotional components—including fear of evaluation, situational discomfort, and avoidance tendencies—the construct is operationalized as a unified measure in the present study using the Social Interaction Anxiety Scale (SIAS), which provides a reliable and empirically validated assessment of social anxiety severity [5][10].

KEYWORDS: *Social Interaction Anxiety; Social Interaction Anxiety Scale; Adolescents; College Students; Fear of Negative Evaluation; Social Avoidance; Psychosocial Functioning; Cognitive-Behavioural Factors; Mental Health; India.*

AIM:

To systematically assess the level of social interaction anxiety among adolescent college students in Chennai using a standardized psychometric instrument, and to examine its behavioural manifestations in terms of fear of negative evaluation, interpersonal discomfort, and social avoidance.

MATERIALS AND METHOD

Research Design The present study employed a cross-sectional descriptive research design to assess the level of social interaction anxiety among adolescent college students.

Participants and Sampling

The sample comprised adolescent students aged 17–20 years, enrolled in undergraduate programs in

selected colleges in Chennai, India. Participants were selected using a random sampling technique to ensure representativeness. Inclusion criteria included regular attendance, willingness to participate, and ability to comprehend English.

Instrument

Social interaction anxiety was assessed using the Social Interaction Anxiety Scale (SIAS) developed by Mattick and Clarke [5]. The SIAS is a 20-item self-report measure rated on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 0 (“not at all characteristic of me”) to 4 (“extremely characteristic of me”), yielding total scores between 0 and 80.

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The instrument demonstrates high internal consistency and test–retest reliability, and has been widely validated across diverse cultural contexts [10][11].

Scoring and Interpretation The total SIAS scores were interpreted as follows:

0–17: Low social interaction anxiety

18–34: Mild social interaction anxiety

35–54: Moderate social interaction anxiety

55–80: Severe social interaction anxiety

Procedure

Prior to data collection, institutional permission was obtained from the selected colleges. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study, and informed consent was secured. The SIAS was administered in a classroom setting under standardized conditions to ensure consistency.

Data Analysis

The collected data were coded and analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Descriptive statistics, including mean, standard deviation, frequency, and percentage, were computed to determine the levels of social interaction anxiety among participants.

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RESULTS

Descriptive Statistics of Social Interaction Anxiety The level of social interaction anxiety among adolescent college students was assessed using the Social Interaction Anxiety Scale (SIAS). Descriptive statistics, including mean and standard deviation, were computed to determine the overall level of anxiety.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of SIAS Scores (N = 120)

Variable	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)
Social Interaction Anxiety	42.36	10.84

Table 2: Level-wise Distribution of Social Interaction Anxiety

Level	Score Range	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Low	0–17	10	8.3%
Mild	18–34	28	23.3%
Moderate	35–54	56	46.7%
Severe	55–80	26	21.7%

Interpretation

The results indicate that the mean SIAS score (M = 42.36, SD = 10.84) falls within the moderate range of social interaction anxiety, suggesting that, on average, participants experience a noticeable degree of discomfort and apprehension in social situations.

Further analysis of the distribution reveals that a substantial proportion of participants (68.4%) fall within the moderate to severe categories, highlighting a pronounced prevalence of elevated social interaction anxiety among adolescent college students. In contrast, only a small percentage (8.3%) of participants reported low levels of anxiety, indicating that minimal social anxiety is relatively uncommon within this population.

The observed variability ($SD = 10.84$) suggests individual differences in anxiety levels, reflecting that while some students demonstrate adaptive social functioning, a considerable number experience heightened vulnerability. Overall, these findings underscore the significance of social interaction anxiety as a critical psychosocial concern within the academic context.

Figure 1: Distribution of Social Interaction Anxiety Levels (N=120)

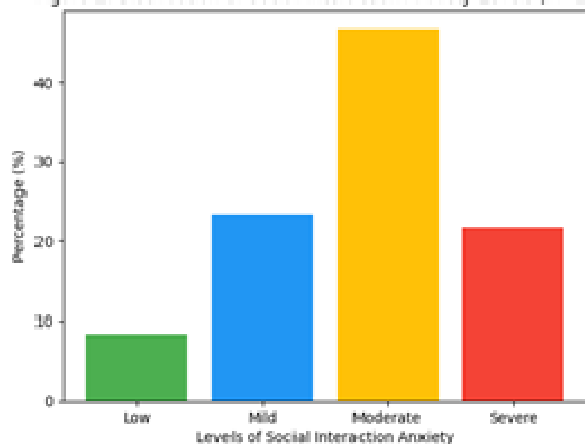


Figure 1: Distribution of Social Interaction Anxiety Levels among Adolescent College Students (N = 120)

DISCUSSION

The study found a moderate level of social interaction anxiety ($M = 42.36$, $SD = 10.84$) among adolescent college students, indicating it as a significant psychosocial concern. Many students experience self-consciousness and discomfort in social situations, which may affect academic and interpersonal functioning.

A large proportion of participants (68.4%) fell within moderate to severe levels, reflecting the psychological demands of academic environments characterized by peer evaluation, performance pressure, and social comparison [6][9][15].

From a cognitive-behavioural perspective, social interaction anxiety is linked to maladaptive cognitions such as fear of negative evaluation and anticipatory anxiety, which reinforce avoidance behaviours and maintain the anxiety cycle [1][3][7]. Although avoidance provides temporary relief, it limits corrective experiences and strengthens dysfunctional beliefs [3][11].

The variability in scores ($SD = 10.84$) indicates differences in coping and social competence, with some students showing resilience while others remain vulnerable to impaired functioning [2][14].

These findings are consistent with existing research, particularly within high-pressure academic and socio-cultural contexts in India [6][8][12][9][15]. The

results emphasize the need for cognitive-behavioural interventions focusing on cognitive restructuring, exposure, social skills training, and adaptive coping strategies [3][6].

Figure 2: Proportion of Social Interaction Anxiety Levels (N=120)

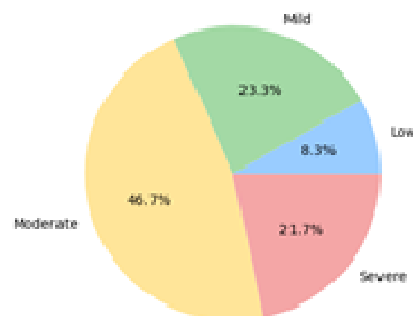


Figure 2: Proportion of Social Interaction Anxiety Levels based on SIAS Scores (N = 120)

In addition, the integration of institution-based mental health programs within colleges can facilitate early identification, prevention, and intervention, thereby promoting overall psychological well-being and academic success among adolescents [8][12].

In conclusion, the present study contributes to the growing body of literature by demonstrating that social interaction anxiety is a widespread and impactful concern among adolescent college students in Chennai, necessitating systematic assessment and structured intervention at both individual and institutional levels.

IMPLICATIONS

The findings of the present study have important implications for educational institutions, mental health professionals, and policy development related to adolescent well-being. The high prevalence of social interaction anxiety highlights the need for early identification through systematic screening in colleges to detect at-risk students and prevent escalation of difficulties.

Educational institutions should implement structured, evidence-based psychosocial interventions, particularly those grounded in cognitive-behavioural approaches, to reduce anxiety and enhance adaptive functioning. These interventions should focus on cognitive restructuring, reducing fear-based cognitions, and strengthening social and communication skills to improve interpersonal competence [3][6].

There is also a critical need to strengthen institutional counselling and mental health services, ensuring accessibility, confidentiality, and continuity of care [8][12]. Furthermore, integrating life skills training, emotional regulation strategies, and peer interaction

programs into academic and co-curricular frameworks can support students' overall psychosocial development.

CONCLUSION

Social interaction anxiety is identified as a prevalent psychological concern among adolescent college students, encompassing fear of negative evaluation, interpersonal discomfort, and avoidance behaviours, as reflected through SIAS.

The findings indicate that a considerable proportion of students experience moderate to severe levels of social interaction anxiety, which can adversely affect academic engagement, social involvement, and overall psychosocial functioning. This highlights the necessity for early identification, systematic assessment, and timely intervention.

Implementing structured, evidence-based psychosocial interventions—particularly those grounded in cognitive-behavioural principles—can effectively reduce anxiety and enhance social competence, adaptive functioning, and psychological well-being [6][8][12]. In addition, strengthening institutional mental health services within educational settings is crucial to provide continuous and accessible support for students.

Overall, the study emphasizes the need for sustained and comprehensive strategies to address social interaction anxiety, thereby fostering healthier and more resilient adolescent populations.

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